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## Chapter 6

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### Meeting Students' Academic Needs Through Program Options

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Quality programs must meet individual student needs. In general, the learner goals we desire for high-ability students are to have the student:

- ✓ demonstrate a high level of mastery of the content and skills of the core curriculum
- ✓ master content and skills as appropriate
- ✓ develop and challenge abilities in using higher levels of thinking
- ✓ cultivate self-directed learning and self-evaluation skills
- ✓ produce original knowledge and products
- ✓ exhibit personal growth toward self-understanding and self-expression
- ✓ share a highly developed love of learning and doing
- ✓ demonstrate interpersonal growth and understanding

#### DESIGNING AN INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PLAN

In the design of a plan for the individual student, each of the above factors, plus the *student's interests* and *style of learning* must be considered, as well as the curriculum and method of delivery so that the student has the opportunity to achieve the desired goals. As evidenced in the learner goals for high-ability students, not only *academic* areas but also *social and emotional* goals are addressed. It is vitally important that an individual learning plan address both of these areas.

The individual learning plan for a student should be developed with input from the classroom teacher or teachers, the enrichment specialist, the parents, the counselor, and the student, and any others involved in the implementation of the plan (e.g., mentors or administrators).

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The plan should indicate who is accountable for the implementation of the plan and who is responsible for the fulfillment of each goal or objective. Generally, the program coordinator is responsible for the overall plan, but classroom teachers or mentors may be co-facilitators of the academic curriculum. The counselor is often involved in the social/emotional areas of the plan. Each participant (particularly parents and older students), plus the building administrator, should have a copy of the plan.

The plan should also indicate the date that the goals and objectives are to be implemented and when they are to be completed.

## **ACADEMIC ISSUES**

This plan should stress *acceleration* of the curriculum where appropriate, *plus enrichment* in the areas of interest. Modifications to the curriculum for high-ability students involves a three-step process:

1. Credit is given for prior learning.
2. There is a reduction (compacting) of tasks and/or replacement of “regular” tasks with a more challenging study.
3. New experiences or activities are constructed and these activities capitalize on the students’ strengths.

With a differentiated curriculum-based program, mastery of the learner goals in each content area is considered a basic educational requirement. The natural extension or enrichment of these outcomes is necessary because of the early mastery of these outcomes by the student as compared to their age/grade peers.

### **“What Do They Know”—or—Credit for Prior Knowledge**

- ✓ assess prior learning using formalized tests, observations, or evaluation of student products
- ✓ depend on the established curriculum with defined objectives and assessment
- ✓ give students an opportunity to review the objectives and practice the skills to be tested
- ✓ set competency expectations at an agreed upon level (often 80%)
- ✓ manage more easily by units or small sections during the early years of schooling and by courses or semesters during high school
- ✓ ensure the practice with board policy

## **“How Do You Build on What They Know”—or— What Do They Do Instead?**

- ✓ provide instructional options using advanced level thinking skills to extend regular curriculum
- ✓ provide a variety of activities in various learning styles relating to the objectives
- ✓ encourage student production of ideas or products to meet extended objectives
- ✓ keep records of process and the products of the student's extended study (a process-folio with input and evaluation from the student showing the work in progress, as well as the final product may be appropriate)
- ✓ grading should be based on a combination of planning, including time management, and the quality of the product.

A well-developed individual learning plan for a high-ability learner should be integrated into the regular curriculum and should extend it. The learnings should be as a replacement and extension of the general curriculum, not in addition to it. This plan should be based on the student's prior work (thus utilizing the process-folio) and addressing both strengths and needs. The student should play an integral part in developing the plan, refining it during the process, assessing the learnings and the use of time and resources, and finally in developing the next plan. The student should be given responsibilities for his/her own learning.

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## **Curriculum Design Standards**

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Curriculum design is the plan for the instructional component of the gifted and talented student's program. It includes the content, methodology, resources, and products of instruction. Without sound curricular practices, program configurations are meaningless. Curriculum involving gifted and talented students is the focus of these standards. They should be applied to any class in which gifted and talented students are enrolled.

### **1. Curriculum (Preschool-12) Is Articulated, Comprehensive, and Includes Substantive Scope and Sequence**

Curriculum that responds to the needs of gifted and talented students appears in all grades and all subject areas. A scope and sequence plan outlining the types and progression of skills to be learned is available and consulted when making curricular decisions about individual students.

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**2. Curriculum Is Based on the Assessed Needs of Students Including the Areas of Intellectual, Emotional, Physical, Ethical, and Social Development**

The needs of gifted and talented students extend beyond academics. Fullscale assessment conducted during or after identification can give instructors valuable information for curricular planning. A student's instructional plan reflects the unique needs of the individual student.

**3. Curriculum Matches Substantive Content With the Developmental Levels of the Gifted and Talented Student**

Most gifted students have developmental patterns that must be taken into account when planning curriculum. Physical, cognitive, and emotional growth are among the developmental factors that can affect how students learn and how they express what they have learned.

**4. Curriculum Incorporates Content and Experiences That Employ and Facilitate Understanding of the Latest Ideas, Principles, and Technology in a Given Content Area**

With rapidly changing academic fields of study, it is important that curriculum, including gifted and talented students, recognizes new ideas and is modified to reflect the changes in the form of the disciplines, how the fields are thought about and conveyed, what is important to know, and the technology used.

**5. Curriculum Provides Differentiation and Challenge for Students Through Involvement with Advanced and Rigorous Content and Procedures**

The content and procedures used in curriculum are compatible with the abilities of the students involved in it. The opportunity to study content at a level commensurate with ability and achievement levels is offered to all gifted and talented students.

**6. Students Develop Critical and Creative Thinking Skills Through Instruction and Experiences Rooted in the Content Areas**

Skills for processing and evaluating information are part of the curriculum design. Students employ such techniques as original research, independent study, problem solving, and invention as part of their study of content areas in order to develop these skills.

**7. Students Have Opportunities to Engage in Experiential and Interactive Learning Involving Real-Life Experiences That May Result in the Development of Sophisticated Products**

Gifted and talented students are given the chance to become actively involved with the field they are studying. This may include activities such as working with a professional in the field through a mentorship or internship, studying a topic in depth in the library or laboratory, or developing an original product (i.e., book, idea, plan, portfolio, etc.) and presenting it publicly.

8. **Flexible Pacing Is Employed, Allowing Students to Learn at the Pace and Level Appropriate to Their Abilities and Skills**

Students are given the opportunity to work at their own level and pace. Assessment of skill levels, acceleration, skill groups, curriculum compacting, and individualization are among the methods that may be a part of the flexible pacing process.

9. **Curriculum Addresses the Attitudes and Skills Needed for Lifelong Independent Learning**

Gifted and talented students learn a great deal on their own. It is vital that they be given the opportunity to develop the skills needed to become lifelong, independent learners.

10. **Specialists in Content Areas, Instructional Techniques, and Gifted Child Education Work With Curriculum Planners When Curriculum Is Being Planned and Evaluated**

A team approach to curriculum planning is in place to ensure that the curriculum responds to the needs of gifted students, reflects current content of practices in the academic fields, and is consistent with the goals and policies of the school district.

*The assessment of the learner outcomes for highability students are no different than the best assessments for all students.*

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Reprinted from Council for Exceptional Children, The Association for the Gifted (1990), *Standards for Program Involving the Gifted and Talented*. Reston, VA: ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children.

## **ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING**

The assessment of the learner outcomes for high-ability students are no different than the best assessments for all students.

Assessment data should address:

- ✓ Evidence of the extent to which students use *critical thinking* developed within the program to modify behaviors

*Authentic assessment should integrate with the learning and instruction process and be a key part of that process.*

- ✓ Evidence of students' ability to display key *skills* addressed by the education program
- ✓ Evidence of students' *attitudes* toward program goals
- ✓ Evidence of students' knowledge regarding the *content* and data included in the education program

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Program Assessment : a six-step process to curriculum improvement, Montana Office of Public Instruction, 1991.

Authentic assessment should integrate with the learning and instruction process and be a key part of that process. Rieneke Zessoules and Howard Gardner (developer of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences) have studied assessments as a support to more effective learning and have listed six important experiences.

“Students are challenged to do the following:

1. Tackle project work regularly and frequently. These students don't create one dance phrase, write one dramatic scene, or paint one family portrait and then move on to the next unit. They produce many works, exploring many aspects of the given discipline.
2. Judge their own work—not once or twice, but again and again, as it is in progress, finally completed, or in relation to earlier and later works.
3. Collaborate and converse with others, not as simply an interesting switch of pace, but as a critical element of working and thinking as active learners discussing, sharing, and learning from others' perceptions.
4. Distinguish a real audience for their work beyond the classroom teacher—challenging them to reflect on the intent and purpose of their work.
5. Picture their learning and development over time again, not only at the end of the year, but also across the weeks, months, and even years of their academic careers.
6. Understand what it means to get better—helping them to develop and strive for standards of excellence and performance.”

Zessoules, Rieneke; and Howard Gardner, “Authentic Assessment: Beyond the Buzzword and Into the Classroom,” Expanding Student Assessment, Edited by Vito Perrone, ASCD, 1991.

The development, implementation, and assessment of an Individual Learning Plan will customize the learning, build on the strengths, and support the needs of the student.

The Individual Learning Plan addresses the “how” you provide the needed services that your district defined in the philosophy statement. The student assessment is based on meeting the standards outlined in the Individual Learning Plan. The program is assessed on how well the various options available through the ILPs meet student needs.

### **For more information on students’ academic needs:**

Borland, James H.; Planning and Implementing Programs for the Gifted, Teachers College Press, New York, 1989

Colorado State Advisory Committee for Gifted and Talented Student Education, “Toward Principles Governing Outcomes, Learning Tasks, and Performance Standards for Gifted and Talented Learners,” Colorado State Board of Education, June 1992

Davis, Gary A. and Sylvia B. Rimm; Education of the Gifted and Talented, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1989

Dettmer, Peggy; “Purposes and Programs for the Gifted,” Kansas State University, 1983

Perrone, Vito, Editor; Expanding Student Assessment, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; Alexandria, Virginia; 1991

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